Hinduism Today's Annual Literary Review
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Hinduism Today's Annual Literary Review

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Edited and Illustrated by Deva and Gayatri Rajan Produced by our Readers.

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* Poems
* Short stories
* Essays
* Children's writings
* Critiques and issues
* Humor
* Encounters with sages
* Quotes and drawings that move and inspire us toward dharma.

The time has come again to enjoy reflections on life and dharma from Hinduism's leaders and followers in our Annual Literary Review: A Journal of Contemporary Hindu Thought and Expression.We feature within poems, stories, essays, youthful folios and notable quotes spun and sprung from the soil of Sanatana Dharma. Share in the excitement of pilgrimage; the agony of adolescence; the revelations gained through deep

reflection and learn about the gift called gratitude which, thankfully, we have all been given. Take a look and see.

O Ganesha, with your curved trunk
And an impressive presence, you radiate
The lustre of millions of suns,
Remove all obstacles from my path and
Make my actions successful.

An Offering
An ancient Sanskrit prayer freely rendered by
Sri Eknath Easwaran

I offer to the Supreme Being
My deeds, my words, my thoughts.
May everyone reach the Supreme Goal.
May everyone strive for the good of all.
May noble thoughts fill the minds of all.
May joy fill the hearts of all.
May selfish people become selfless.
May selfless people become illumined.
May illumined people go beyond death.
And may they help others
To go beyond death.

A Garland of Meditation
From Natchintanai, the "good thoughts" of

Sage Yogaswami of Sri Lanka

The sovereign of the devas
The Primordial Source of all,
The splendor of Vedanta,
That cruel bondage will dispel,
Who stands beyond the tattvas
And makes us one with Him
By forsaking our attachment
'Tis Him we have beheld.
That One Supreme, the siddha, who all
Things doth perform, Let us meditate
On Him before our bodies fall.

The Song of The Sannyasin
Swami Vivekananda

Wake up the note! the song that had its birth far off, where worldly taint could never reach, in mountain caves and glades of forest deep, whose calm no sigh for lust or wealth or fame could ever dare to break; where rolled the stream of knowledge, truth, and bliss that follows both. Sing high that note, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Strike off thy fetters! bonds that bind thee down, of shining gold, or darker, baser ore--love, hate; good, bad; and all the dual throng. Know slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free;for fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind.Then off with them, sannyasin bold! Say,

"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Let darkness go; the will-o'-the-wisp that leads with blinking light to pile more gloom on gloom. This thirst for life forever quench; it drags from birth to death, and death to birth, the soul. He conquers all who conquers self. Know this and never yield, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

"Who sows must reap," they say, "and cause must bring the sure effect: good, good; bad, bad; and none escapes the law. But who so wears a form must wear the chain." Too true; but far beyond both name and form is atman, ever free. Know thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

They know not truth who dream such vacant dreams as father, mother, children, wife and friend. The sexless Self--whose father He? whose child? whose friend, whose foe, is He who is but One? The Self is all in all--none else exists; and thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

There is but One: the Free, the Knower, Self, without a name, without a form or stain. In Him is maya, dreaming all this dream.The Witness, He appears as nature, soul. Know thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Where seekest thou? That freedom, friend, this world nor that can give. In books and temples, vain thy search. Thine only is the hand that holds the rope that drags thee on. Then cease lament. Let go thy hold, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Say, "Peace to all. From me no danger be to aught that lives. In those that dwell on high, in those that lowly creep--I am the Self in all! All life, both here and there, do I renounce, all heavens and earths and hells, all hopes and fears." Thus cut thy bonds, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Heed then no more how body lives or goes. Its task is done: let karmafloat it down. Let one put garlands on, another kick this frame; say naught. No praise or blame can be where praiser, praised, and blamer, blamed, are one.Thus be thou calm, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed of gain reside. No man who thinks of woman as his wife can ever perfect be; nor he who owns the least of things, nor he whom anger chains, can ever pass through maya's gates. So, give these up, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend? The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food what chance may bring--well cooked or ill, judge not. No food or drink can taint

that noble Self which knows Itself. Like rolling river free thou ever be, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Few only know the truth. The rest will hate and laugh at thee, great one; but pay no heed. Go thou, the free, from place to place, and help them out of darkness, maya'sveil. Without the fear of pain or search for pleasure, go beyond them both, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Thus day by day, till karma'spower's spent, release the soul forever. No more is birth, nor I, nor thou, nor God, nor man. The "I" has All become, the All is "I" and Bliss. Know thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say,
"Om Tat Sat, Om."

Ananda Natesa
Master Nome

Whirling, swirling
Effulgent Bliss
Of Reality--the Self:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Tranquil lagoon
Of Peace Absolute
Oceanic joy
with billows of ecstasy:

That Thou art, O Siva.

Being happiness,
Radiating happiness,
This is the way
of the yogi-sage serene:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Timeless Bliss,
Immutable Peace
At all times,
In the midst
of all apparent experience:
That Thou art, O Siva.

There is no imagination
And therefore no creation;
Spacelike Void of boundless Bliss:
That Thou art, O Siva.

If one imagines imagination,
And thence a creation,
Only Thou art present
In scintillating echoes of Self-Bliss:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Immovable and serene
Is the yogi-rishi,
Merged in Thee

O, Ocean of Bliss.
That Thou art, O Siva.

All consuming eternal Silence,
Whose dance is self-illumined Bliss,
Perfect union without an "other":
That Thou art, O Siva.

Identity of all,
Oneness of love,
Uncaused happiness,
Unconditioned joy:
That Thou art, O Siva.

No cause of samsara's suffering
is ever present;
Diminution of blissful Brahman
Is ever absent.
That Thou art, O Siva.

Pointing to refuge,
The peace of the Self:
Bestowing Grace
The state of happiness itself:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Ego-death, unsurpassed Bliss,
Uninhibited dance of joy eternal;
Eternal dance of infinite Bliss;

Silent dance of ineffable joy;
That Thou art, O Siva.

Sounding the unstruck
in vibratory Bliss;
Consuming the veils
In ecstasy's fire
That Thou art, O Siva.

Left eye of experience
of happiness immediate;
Right eye of Knowledge
Of Bliss's permanent abode;
That Thou art, O Siva.

Opened third eye
Of blissful Awareness;
Being-Knowledge-Experience
Devoid of inner and outer:
That Thou art, O Siva.

With upraised foot of transcendent Bliss,
Rudraksha tears of compassionate Bliss;
Blissful slayer of delusion's suffering,
Blissful revealer of Bliss itself:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Laughing skulls garland's immortal Bliss,
Blissful laughter that destroyed three cities,

The single arrow penetrating
them simultaneously,
The blissful Truth of the stateless Self:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Turning even experience venomous
Into Liberation's dance of delight,
Wild, care-free locks flying
in the breeze of Bliss,
Permeated with the fragrance
of the flower of joy;
That Thou art, O Siva.

Ganges of pure Peace,
Ancient and serene, flows from Her
Your intensity
who dwells forever supported by Thee;
That Thou art, O Siva.

Cool moon so tranquil
Adorning Thy head,
Serene, timeless luminosity
Setting all at rest:
That thou art, O Siva.

Anklet and bracelet
Tinkle in crystalline joy
that is heard by Thine
own jewelled ear,
The one Consciousness alone;

That Thou art, O Siva.

Infinite circle aflame,
Of luminous Bliss,
Smile of great mystery
Indefinable Bliss:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Bliss of my Guru,
Siva Himself;
Bliss of the Innate,
The Self itself:
That Thou art, O Siva.

Ananda--Natesa, I am lost in Thee.

A Tear Met the Dust
Huston Smith: On contemplating the commissioned portrait of a British Viceroy of India, carrying the caption,"Served with Distinction, 1910-1932."

Who could have dreamed, gazing on this willful face,
That India touched him more than he touched her.
Trains multiplied, of course, huge baby-booms of belching smoke and
whistles' wail. English, too, improved as Etons
--short pants, broad white collars, the works--
Sprouted in unlikely places. Even the manly sports took hold,
As yogas bowed to bat and ball. Horses wheeled to mallet's

stroke,
While women watched in printed frocks.
But I have heard: His wife declared he mellowed through the years.
Listened more, insisted less. Was more patient when a servant slipped.
And when the time to leave rolled round,
He knelt and kissed the parched, red ground.
A tear met the dust in that waterless land,
That had known so well his heavy hand.

Nirvana
Sri Chinmoy

No mind, no form, I only exist;
Now ceased all will and thought.
The final end of Nature's dance,
I am It whom I have sought.

I barter nothing with time and deeds;
My cosmic play is done.

When one's cosmic play is done,
he enters into nirvana.If one is a tired
soul and wants to go permanently beyond
the conflict, beyond the capacities
of the cosmic forces, then nirvana is to be welcomed.

Nirvana is the cessation of all earthly

activities, the extinction of desires,
suffering, bondage, limitation and death. In
this state one goes beyond the conception
of time and space. This world, earth,
is the playground for the dance of the
cosmic forces. But when one enters into
nirvana, the cosmic forces yield to the
ultimate highest Truth, and the
Knower, the Known and the
Knowledge or Wisdom are like three
angels blended into one.
At that time one becomes
both the Knower and the Known.

The Dance
Of Shiva
Srimata Swami Atmananda

The dance of Shiva
is the dance of Cosmic Energy.
It is the dance of birth and death and
Divine Harmony. It is the dance of light
and darkness and day and night.
In every atom it is the dance of
"Eternal Delight" In every being it is the
dance of Existence. In the ambitious
it is the dance of persistence.
In every face it is the dance of a smile.
It is the dance of innocence
in a child. It is the dance of form
and size and color.

The Inner
Self of All
Is One
Srimata Swami Atmananda

The inner Self of all is one.
Like the reflections of the sun;
On countless inner lakes it shines--
It is the Atman most sublime.
In brown and black and white it is the same.
This is the most mysterious game.
It is neither male nor female--
It is Universal Consciousness, Hail!
Like sparks of a fire we are one.
From this Universal Consciousness
we are born. And to that Source
we finally return, which is
our eternal Cosmic Home.

Remembering . . .
Excerpted from the journal of Meenakshi Devi Palani, age 14

Day 22~Tanjore to Chidambaram January 3, 1996

My family and I and about forty other seekers are pilgrimaging through the holy temples of South India with our Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyswami. Here, I have found my true identity. Deep inside my soul, I am happy, in pure bliss. Encountering many difficult experiences, I have kept an open mind, learning about my karma and my dharma.

Today we bounced along in the bus to Chidambaram, the center of the universe. It is said that the gravity here is the strongest of any place on earth. Inside the temple, Ganesh Dikshitar lead us to the Chit Sabha, the innermost part of the temple. Here is where the great Lord Siva performed His Cosmic Dance. To the right of Siva I saw the Goddess Parvati. She was dripping with gold and jewels. To the left of Nataraja is the Chidambaram secret. There is no image, this is the formless Siva.

As we were leaving, I turned to have a small glance as a memory of my first day in Chidambaram. My heart was filled with joy and love as I saw the sun set behind the beautiful golden roof, made of pure gold leaves. I was told that there is the same number of leaves as the number of breaths taken in a day. I wonder how many that is?
In Siva bliss, Meenakshi

Day 23~Chidambaram January 4, '96

I did not sleep that well last night because bed bugs were crawling all over me and biting me. As I woke up, I felt the temple calling me. We went out to help pull Lord Siva Nataraja's
chariot. The ropes were ten inches thick and the wheels nearly twenty feet high. I could not believe how gargantuan the chariot was! It took hundreds of devotees more than twelve hours to pull the chariot around the temple perimeter. One sadhu rolled in front of the chariot the entire distance.

A few of the men were asked to help carry the Nataraja inside the temple to the cultural hall. So the rest of us went inside the temple and sat down to wait for Nataraja and Parvati to come. After we waited for a few hours they finally came. Just one glimpse and I could feel my heart burning with love and joy. Just one short glimpse. Then I saw the men that helped carry the Nataraja. I just looked at Uncle Rajakumar and saw his happiness. He was so happy and filled with Nataraja's captivating love. I felt like crying with happiness. He could not stop smiling.

In Siva consciousness, Meenakshi

Day 24 Chidambaram January 5, '96

Today never really started or ended, it just went on. We were only at the hotel for two hours. We were told to rest so I tried. I did not have much success. I tossed and turned anxious to return to the temple. We went back to the temple at 2 am. When we arrived, the rest of the town (all of India it seemed) was already there so we had to stand around for awhile.

The abishekam was long, really long. They poured tons of vibhuti, gallons and gallons of milk, panchamritam, young coconut milk, sandal wood paste and last of all tons of flowers on the deity. When the abishekam was completed, we shoved and pushed our way in front of Nataraja to glance at his magnificent form. Just one quick peek and the guards pushed us away--people here are so aggressively religious! The floor was saturated with the slippery, slimy milk, panchamritam and dirt. I had to struggle to keep my balance. If I fell down I would have been trampled and my white clothes would be drenched

with black gooey slime. Thank God I didn't fall.
Grateful me, Meenakshi

Day 24~Part II

We had a tour of the temple. It was about midmorning and most of the people went to the hotel for a rest. The Dikshitar received permission to take us on the roof...a rare event. From the roof I could see the whole temple--the temple tank, golden roof, thousand pillar hall and all the people walking around. I had a good look at the golden roof. It was so shiny in the morning sun. We also had a brief meditation sitting over the Dakshinamurthy shrine. The sky was so clear and bright blue. It was so beautiful and welcoming I took a deep breath and felt my body relax.

We also went to a Ganesha shrine. This was the most beautiful Ganesh I had ever seen in all my travels. I immediately fell in love with Him. It had a shiny silver kavacham. Such a happy, smiling face. In sandalwood paste, they had drawn the eyes and pottu in beautiful detail, so happy and full of love.

Then some more people went back to the hotel to rest. The others stayed to see the Nataraja and Parvati return to their shrine. It is said that if you get one quick glance at the Nataraja, it is equal to many years of sadhana. Wow! How could I miss out on something like that? I have decided to take advantage of every moment so when I go home I will have no regrets. That is partly why I have spent the last 72 hours in the temple. My heart is now satisfied.

Blessed me, Meenakshi

Day 24~Part III

So far I am not tired. Probably from all the exhilaration and pure luxurious bliss. Back to the final event, seeing Nataraja return to his shrine. It started with a fairly big group. I stuck to my brother like glue because the crowds are so murderous and I didn't want to be alone in them. We all know how to get back to the hotel in case if we get separated. Good thing!

Entering the cultural hall we got separated because the guard locked the door before all of us got inside. So we went around to the other side. It was a mad rush to be closer to the gate first. Keep in mind there were about seventy to ninety-thousand people there. We were crammed in an unorganized line trying to get in.

Once inside we waited for awhile for the crowd to thin out. No such thing in India. Once it did a tad, the Dikshitar led us through.

Next, after we found a place where we could see the chariot, we sat for many hours. It was nearing three when things started happening. While we were waiting we discussed our plan to get out of there. If we stayed we would get locked in and would have to wait for awhile to get out again. After the chariot goes through they quickly lock the gates. Our plan was to quickly follow the chariot when it went through the gates.

Hopeful me, Meenakshi

My Chidambaram Yatra Concludes

I was granted my wish to see the Lord Nataraja one more time, basking in the bliss of Siva consciousness, Siva's shakti. At that one moment I felt my heart chakra open and love pouring into my soul…Siva shakti flowing through all form. After the chariot went by only four of us made it out of the gate before it was locked, the four of us were Uncle Aditya, Uncle Rajakumar, my brother and I. Outside the gate it was a mad frenzy. Luckily I had my Uncles and brother or I would have been crushed. It was a memorable experience. Later Uncle Aditya asked me if I was scared that I might get crushed. I replied, "No, I had you to protect me." It was fun!

Returning to the hotel my mother told me to eat and rest. Rest at last! I still don't feel that tired but inside I know I am exhausted.
Sleepy me, Meenakshi

In identical verses, the Kathaand the Mundaka Upanishadssay:

"He reveals Himself to whomsoever He chooses."
~The choosing is integral to the mystique of grace.

Mystique of Grace
V. Dhurandhar

To love you and surrender with most of my heart
The whole, I confess, is never there, a part
At all times being in a muddle or a daze
To breathe the air redolent of your grace
Get moved by the starry blue mirroring your face
To nudge remembrance awake to its inward gaze,
And yet get garroted by gathers of cloud
or stalled by drifts of blinding smog--
I feel like crying out to you aloud
From the depths of my psychic bog;
O what means this cruel contradiction,
Wholly beyond my poor comprehension?

Is this your way with all, or just an exception
To test and firm up a maverick's faltering devotion?
Why should life get twisted to a tangled tale
Though the knight in me is after the holy grail?
How could love and grace, and despair and sorrow
Go cheek by jowl? But if, tomorrow,
The frosty shine you have formulated for me
With your mysterious alchemy
Should see my skies, unlock the sluice of living rain
To stir the embryo of joy in my innards of pain
I'll be one more chosen budding glower
To be unfurled in full through the mystique of your power.

REMEMBERING OUR PURPOSE
by Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani

Ever since I can consciously remember, I have been seeking the purpose of life. Even back in the dim recesses of memory

associated with four and five years of age, the desire to "know what I am about" was like a fire burning inside. As I grew older, that fire became more and more intense, and indeed, during my adolescence and late teen years was positively uncomfortable. It was that fire which thrust me into a huge midwestern University in the USA. I gaped at the big city from my small town background. It was that fire which, like a burr under the saddle, forced me to tour European countries, searching, looking, seeking…something for which I did not even know the name.

Drawn with an instinct as irresistible as that of migrating salmon and swans, I found myself in India, an India which twenty five years ago still had the smell of mystic spirituality in every nook and cranny of its life. I had found my general place: now I just had to hone in on the exact spot. That took about one year. My destiny was surely and undoubtedly to be fulfilled in the unique small cosmopolitan city of Pondicherry, on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, South India, in the land of the Tamils. (Once, just for fun, I punctured a hole in a small globe. The hole punctured at Pondicherry came out on the opposite side exactly at the place of my birth.)

That raging fire within found its reflection in the iridescent raiment of my great and glorious Guru who waited for me in our predestined place of appointment. After that, it was a straight flight home. And layer after layer of inessentials were burned away as the years passed.

But another kind of accumulation also occurred simultaneously. A routine, a structure, an organization,

financial support systems, mundane daily tasks needed to keep that structure vital and growing. Occasionally, I looked up and found myself and my original purpose buried under practical considerations.

Last year another explosion occurred as often happens in an evolving life. Non-essentials were once more blown away by the Guru's design. Fresh and clean, albeit naked and shivering, I stood once more, asking the same questions I formulated in my halting baby language fifty years ago. This time the questions themselves became the path and the way, and led deeper into a self which had been well cultivated by the Guru's careful gardening. 'Til we are actually there, the questing never stops. It simply becomes more and more sublime. Our main consideration is to remember our pristine dharma: discovering our innate divinity. And everything else can literally.
  ...hang fire.

Powerful Being
Bharat Thakkar

Mercy is not what I want,
  I'm a soul hanging on my own
  like a spider at the bottom
  of a pitch black dark well,
  irking, hissing, crying
  and sometimes weeping for help;
  though Mercy is not what I what.

Closeness, intimacy, that's what I want,
I need Your honorable company for a while,
Come with Your light and ever-present smile.
I want to share my story with You,
I don't want to dump or unload my miseries,
Come, I want to share with You
whatever I have.

Only You can show me the moon and stars
and the regions beyond infinity.
The worlds of Your simplicity and serenity,
The atoms of beauty
and softness in rose petals,
The cheeks dried from tears and wet eyes
Only You can recognize
where I am trapped.
Still mercy is not what I want,
O, Powerful Being!

I hear the first few drops of rain
dancing on my roof,
The music of the roaring winds,
The smell of steaming dirt
in the unplowed naked fields,
I hear the tunes of monsoon song,
I remember my childhood and
my sweet dreams,
Those moments and memories
well up in my eyes,
It's a bitter sweet love affair with my past,
Let me have my love.
O! Powerful Being!

Another Metamorphosis

Gayatri Rajan

We were so poor. . .
All rough edges and sharp angles
You instructed us kindly, patiently.
And I, embarrassed by impurities abounding,
Even then indulged distressing arrogance.
Yet you persisted. . . insisted. . .
And I succumbed to your magnanimity.
Now the world is You.
The telephone operator sweetly soothes.
Software vendor a helpful brother
Consultant a tender mother
Each voice a happy friend's.
Love is mine to bask in
Your grace the grace of friends pervading
Each place I go I find I'm in your mind.
In every act I see your hand
And every face a facet
of your shining visage
And I, a child as always,
Abandon care
in the gently swirling eddies of your grace
How to pour a so vast gratitude
into silly narrow confines of words?

A Beautiful Poem

Sajila Devi

As I sit by my window, a lovely morning is born

Birds chirping and the sun shining like a jewel
The breeze cool and calm,
and the leaves of the trees sway gently.
I gaze in wonder at the beautiful poem laid out before me.

The world is a poem and not a dream, as some say.
Poetry is coming out of me,
inspiring the pen to run on the paper!

Yes, surely the world is a lovely place, a poem indeed!
I behold a world which was there always, but never seen before.
The agitation of the mind stops and peace fills me.
Call it grace, or blessings or a higher consciousness.
It becomes one with nature and sees reality.

The world as a beautiful poem, I have seen today.
Some see the world as a stage, where men are only players.
Some see the world as Maya, an illusion to be abandoned.
I see otherwise;

the world as a beautiful poem,
A heaven on earth and a creation to marvel and rejoice in.

Maelstrom
Jyothi Palani(age 16)

Everything around me

is confusion,
A huge swirling mass
of people and debris,
One lashes out to me,
I recoil,
Just enough,
To be hit,
With another,
Then another,
Until I almost join the confusion,
Again, and again,
But I'm still in the eye,
Still holding on, To what?
I reach into the sky and search for it,
I reach toward the ground,
I reach in front of me,
But I can't find it,
The maelstrom is coming back,
I can feel it,
I close my eyes,
Slowly I reach into my mind,
Trying to grasp something,
Anything,
To hold onto,
Then I see it,
No, seeing is not the right word,
It's an image,
But more than that,
Infinitely more than that,
I sense it,
What ever it is,
As a lotus bud,
Then it happens,
The lotus blossoms,

Blossoms into a thousand petals,
Cascading in the purest white light,
Within me, In my core.
The maelstrom disappears,
Everything disappears,
Into that brilliant lotus,
And I walk on.

SREE SARASWATHI AMMAN TEMPLE, PADMANABHAPURAM

An unusual temple resides in a historic Kerala palace

By Princess Gowrie Lakshmi Bayi

In more ways than one, Sree Saraswathy Amman reigning inside the imposing walls of the historic Padmanabhapuram Palace has commanded a unique position of importance down the convoluted corridors of centuries. As part of history, She has time and again stood witness to dynastic and territorial fortunes being made and unmade.

Padmanabhapuram is a quiet village about one and a half hour's running time south of Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala State. A brief insight into the background seems to be in order to help comprehend Sree Saraswathy Amman's special character. In the 9th century ce (scholars hold varying views on the time frame), Kamban, the famed devotee sage wrote the great epic Ramayanain Tamil, well known as the Kamba Ramayanam. It is said that he specially worshiped an

idol of Goddess Saraswathi in his personal pujaas source of inspiration for this monumental work. Time passed. When he felt that the day was near at hand for him to relinquish his mortal coil, Kamban resolved to entrust this priceless idol to some person worthy of preserving it for posterity. His choice fell on the then Kulasekhara Perumal (ruler) of Malayala Nady (ancestor to the Travancore royal family) with whom he entrusted this treasure. From then onwards it remained in this family despite changes in its dynastic nomenclature.

In the former half of the seventeen-hundreds, during the reign of Veera Bala Marthanda Varma, maker of modern Travancore, today's Padamanabhapuram Palace was rebuilt and renamed thus, and the name of the territory was changed from Kalkulam to Padmanabhapuram, in homage to his Diety Sree Padmanabha Swamy of Thiruvananthapuram. (This exquisite palace today finds a place in the listed world monuments.) Within the sprawling palace grounds this Goddess Saraswati made Her abode in a small, self-contained temple.

Though Marthanda Varma was desirous of shifting the capital from Padmanabhapuran to Thiruvanathapuram to be near the temple, he expired before he could do it. His nephew and successor Rama Varma, acclaimed in history as "Dharma Raja," carried out his uncle's wish. The Navarathri festival which is so special to the Goddess would, however, as a rule be celebrated at the Padmanabhapuran Palace itself. This king also took an oath that wherever he or his descendants may be, they would bring Her to their home and conduct Navarathri. True to the oath, the idol is seen to have travelled to places in central Travancore like Maveliddara where the King happened to be halting. It is most uncommon for the main idol, Moola

Bimba, to leave its abode and journey forth, but the idol in question is seen exempt from this rule. From the time of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma of immortal fame, from the eighteen-hundreds onwards, this Goddess has been pleased to be in Thiruvananthapuram in the Travancore Palace, in the Fort adjacent to the main temple, for fifteen days including the nine of Navarathri. She arrives with much fanfare and pomp on elephant back in procession accompanied by Sri Kumara Subramanya Swami on a magnificent silver horse and the Kundalini Sakti represented by Goddess Kundani Nanga (in local language) on a palanquin. All of them come from places which once formed a vital part of South Travancore. The other two Deities leave the Goddess at the Fort Palace and proceed to their appointed places in temples outside the fort where they reside for this length of time.

Para Navarathri was once a festival of scholarship and arts, mainly music. Today only the music aspect exists but the festival is celebrated in all sanctity, adhering to parameters laid down way back in time, with well-known artists participating. These concerts take place in front of Saraswathy Amman who sits in Her separate shrine on a beautifully decorated Navarathri Mandapa.

Worship is also carried out in front of the Devi to sacred Granthas, palm leaf texts, and to ancient swords, including one belonging to Maharaja Marthanda Varma. On Vijaya Dasami, the tenth day of the Navarathri festival, little ones are initiated to the world of letters on this mandapa. Saraswathy Amman's power in learning and arts draws more and more devotees here annually. At the last festival, three hundred were present.

It is indeed a matter of utmost gratification and gratitude that despite radical changes in the political, administrative and territorial spheres, this hallowed tradition continues without break. Monarchy does not exist. Administration of the actual temple rests with the Tamil Nadu Devaswom, and the palace in which it is situated is owned by the Kerala Government and controlled by the Ancient Monuments Act. This territory which had played so vital a role in the pages of Travancore history and which was the granary of the state, is now part of neighboring Tamil Nadu following the reorganization of states. Despite all this, Sree Saraswathi Amman's grace enables all paths to be smoothed out and She annually graces the home of the Travancore royalty, making Navarathri a great occasion for the family and a significant religious and cultural event of the city of Thiruvananthapuram.

Temples dedicated to Goddess Saraswathy are rare and can be counted on the finger tips. As such this idol is of considerable note, more so as it had received the deep veneration of Sage Kamban. The idol displays excellent proportions and is in a combination of five metals commonly termed pancha loha. She is in sitting posture and has four arms holding the sankhu, conch, pushpam, flower resembling the sunflower, and grantha , palm leaf scroll. The left lower hand is in abhaya mudra, the gesture of "fear not." Two small idols are seated on par with Her on either side. They are Sree Narasimha Moorthy and Sree Veda Vyasa Maharshi. Their antecedents are obscure. All of them face the east. Granite Deepalakshmisare stationed outside the shrine. On the right of the sanctum and a little removed from it, a few steps lead up to an unadorned shrine opening towards the west. It is dedicated to Siva. Outside the temple walls but close by, a Ganapathy and Nagaraja bask in the shade of a spreading tree. The nearby temple tank is quite

large.

This temple does not remain open as long as its major counterparts, time of entry being limited from 6:30 to 8:30am and 5:45 to 7:15pm. No ritualistic festivals are conducted, possibly because it retains the coloring of a personal shrine, especially as the moola bimbais not fixed to the spot but is movable. Special days are, however, kept up with care and with public participation: like the ten days of Navarathri (when a flame burns in the place of idol which is at Thiruvananthapuram), full moon days of each month and so on. While in Padmanabhapuram Temple Navarathri puja is performed to Devi as Saraswathi, in Thirvananthapuram where the actual idol is present, the concept is that of Devi as Durga, while Saraswathy puja is offered to the Granthas placed before the idol on a separate raised base.

Sree Saraswathy Amman is deemed to be the root of the prosperity of Padmanabhapuram village. Faith in Her efficacy has multiplied after a traumatic 1990 incident when she was stolen, only to be discovered the next day by a school boy and restored to her home.

Time rotates and summers slide by softly in this countryside which is never free from the hold of history. From Her little temple Saraswathy Amman exerts Her unquestioned sway on the people of what has today become two linguistic States. She embodies not only a spiritual legacy but keeps faith burning bright in the eternal nature of Indian culture and ongoing traditions of a deathless past.

GRATITIUDE
By Dr. Anu Mitra

Several years ago, I saw an image in a national magazine which--over the years--became etched in my mind. It was one of those unforgettable "Kodak moments," captured in celluloid, of which important lessons are made. The photograph, accompanied by a story, showed the worst blizzard-like conditions that the Northeastern United States had experienced in a while. In the inclement weather, a van had slipped off its tracks and rammed into a guard rail, ejecting its passengers from within. One of the passengers was a woman in a wheelchair, who had been previously paralyzed from her neck downwards. Her face was open to the elements as she witnessed the other passengers of the van being treated after the accident. While others busied themselves around her, she seemed to face the blizzard head-on. In the way in which she held her head, there was an acceptance of her situation, a coming into a peaceful awareness of things as they were right at that very moment in time. Looking into her eyes in that simple black-and-white picture, I was reminded of Vasishtha's words to Lord Rama, "The great enjoyer is one who does not hate anything or long for anything…who witnesses the whole world-play unaffected by it. He enjoys what is sweet and what is bitter with equal relish, without making an arbitrary distinction, 'This is enjoyable. This is not.'"

Reflecting on that picture, I remember being filled with gratitude not only for myself but also for that unknown other sitting serenely on that icy freeway. I was grateful to God for the full capacity of my body, for the joy of experiencing through my senses, for having a life that seemed unrestricted

and unbounded by obstacles. I felt immense gratitude to the woman strapped to her wheelchair for showing me, in a bubble of time, how fragile our connection was to our lives. I also felt deep gratitude to God for the woman, because even in her incapacity she had obviously reached a level of understanding that was yet beyond my comprehension.

Ever since my scrutiny of that photograph, I have continuously reminded myself of the importance of gratitude, what it means to be grateful, how to express gratitude in daily actions, and how to make kritajnata--the Sanskrit word meaning deep gratitude--a sadhanaunto itself. And through this process, I have also discovered that nourishing the feelings of gratitude from within is indeed a lifelong process. As it ebbs and flows with our outward conditions, our responsibility lies in accessing our Guru's grace which ferries us across our fallow times.

From the Middle Latin gratitudoand the Latin gratus,the word gratitude means to be at grace or to be thankful. Until I looked up the roots of the word, I had no idea that the two concepts were interconnected. I realized, for the first time, that to be grateful is to become one with the grace of my Guru. Whenever I am in alignment with her divinity, I am able to bear whatever comes my way with a cheerful heart. With Her grace, I am able to be in touch with the deep wellsprings of gratitude and thankfulness that spontaneously arises from within me. As Gurumayi Swami Chidvilasananda has said, "Whatever happens is a great blessing. The Guru's grace gives us the capacity to experience this and to live in the joy of gratitude for it."(Darshan, vol.43, p.29).

Like power, wealth, and glory, the concept of gratitude is loaded with paradox. "Be grateful for the least gift and then you become worthy to receive a greater one," Gurumayi reminds us, "When we become grateful, we receive more. When we show our gratitude, we receive even more." (Darshan, vol. 43, p. 27). Baba Muktananda illustrated unforgettably the meaning of gratitude in the opening lines of Play of Consciousness, "I am a follower of the Siddha path and I am alive by the grace of a Siddha." In acknowledging the immeasurable role of his Guru, Bhagwan Nityananda, Baba reminds us that even a Siddha like himself has the capacity for great gratitude.

Seekers and thinkers through the ages have relied on the mysterious power of gratitude to uplift them. Many centuries ago, the Roman orator Cicero wrote: "A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues." St. Vincent de Paul said: "We should spend as much time in thanking God for His benefits as we do in asking Him for them." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Romantic poet of the nineteenth century, wrote: "In the deepest night of trouble and sorrow God gives us so much to be thankful for that we need never cease our singing. With all our wisdom and foresight we can take a lesson in gladness and gratitude from the happy bird that sings all night, as if the day were not long enough to tell its joy." And Shakespeare wrote in his play Henry VI, Part II: "O, Lord that lends me life, Lend me a heart replete with thankfulness!"

To be thankful for our life, for every small detail of it, for all those parts we take for granted, is essential for our success. This success is not measured in what cars we drive or what

positions we hold in the workplace. Rather, this success is derived from a deep contentment with ourselves, with our life as we know it. It is a feeling that arises from a genuine appreciation of what God has given us. In the manner in which we acknowledge those gifts, paradoxically enough, our capacity to feel grateful is accordingly multiplied or diminished.

Gratitude is sometimes described as the conscience of memory. It is the checkpoint against which is measured the love that we feel in our hearts. It is a signal sent to our brain to acknowledge the feelings that we experience in our heart region. It is a deeply-felt thank you that the heart urges the brain to verbalize. And, like sadhana itself, gratitude is a virtue that must be cultivated as long as we have life in our bodies.

The simple ability to say "thank you" seems like such a monumental task sometimes. Our egos come in the way of our simplest actions. Our thinking mind tells our feeling mind that saying "thank-you" is perhaps not the best political move that we can make. Our carelessness gets the better of us. We postpone saying thank you till the moment has passed and it seems not to matter to us any more. The postal service often complains about this phenomenon. In the months before Christmas, for instance, post offices all over the United Sates are deluged with letters to Santa Claus written by children asking for various things, in the American custom. Yet, in the months after this holiday, the thank-you letters that Santa Claus receives for the gifts that he has given are insignificant by comparison.

If we remember to say thank you for everything big or small, gratitude will become second nature to us. Our sadhanawill become sweeter as we say thank you more and more frequently. The practice of feeling grateful will also guard us against the sharp edges of thanklessness, of ingratitude, that arises from a heart filled with bitterness.

The opposite of gratitude--ingratitude--takes us out of alignment with the Guru's shakti. By questioning her grace and the generous gifts that she has already bestowed on us, we open for scrutiny our own dry hearts and limited understandings. As Gurumayi has said, "Ingratitude causes most of the miseries of our life, even more than ignorance of the Self. When we are ungrateful, we are not able to enjoy happiness." (Darshan, vol. 43. p.27).

Some years ago, I had a painful experience of the feeling of ingratitude. I came to Siddha Yoga in 1990, with the grace of my Guru. As I adapted to the practices, I also readied myself for my first face-to-face meeting with Gurumayi. In late 1991, bundling an infant, I found myself urging my family to make the 14-hour road trip to South Fallsburg. As I sat in the Shakti Mandap on that cool August day, I remembered carrying on a quarrel with myself. Did I truly belong to Siddha Yoga? Was this the right place for me?

When my turn came to meet my Guru, I had a crying baby in my arms and a heart full of anxious questions. I felt excitement at seeing Gurumayi. Because of our common backgrounds, I felt confident that she would reach out to me and wipe away all my questions with one definitive answer. Gurumayi broke

the silence. "What do you want from me?" she asked, in a compassionate voice. "Gurumayi, I want your blessings," I answered, somewhat sure that that was the right thing to have said. I was stunned at her reply. "You don't need my blessings," Gurumayi said, "The fact that you have come here is enough. You have everything that you need." And, with that, darshan was over.

I had just learned the most important lesson of my life: that living out of touch with God's numerous blessings was not the most joyous of existences. Since I had a choice, I could opt to fill my life with thankfulness for God's bountiful presence, through both the "good" and the "bad." My choice became to align myself with God's grace so that I could see the miracle latent in every experience.

It took me many years to contemplate the full intent of Gurumayi"s words. With every passing year, I realize more acutely that Gurumayi was giving me a road map to all those dry, brittle, unfeeling parts of my heart that had made it a habit to feel ingratitude, impatience, anger, and bitterness. By opening my eyes to all the blessings that were already present in my life, she was showing me the ample hand of God, Her generosity and bounty in making all things possible. In comparison, my attitude was that of a miser, greedily hoarding all the gifts till I had hidden them from my view. Contemplating the Guru's words and meditating on them unceasingly continues to keep me in alignment with her grace whenever I feel that I am slipping.

Four years later, I tell myself that I am truly alive today

because of the grace of a Siddha--Gurumayi, Baba, Bhagwan, and the Siddhas of Siddhalok. The blessings that my Guru has bestowed on me are enormous. The vocabulary for thanking my Guru is insufficient compared to the gratitude that I feel in my heart. Yet, every gift that I acknowledge makes my connection to God stronger. As Gurumayi reminds us: "Treat everything you do as a gift from God. Then your obligations will become your treasures" (Darshan, vol 43, p.84).

"Having slain every kind of goodness, one may yet escape, but there is no escape for those who let gratitude die."--Tirukkural

Meet this Year's Contributors . . .

Sri V. Dhurandhar:After a three year stint as editor of an English weekly in Bihar, V. Dhurandhar did freelance writing, contributing articles and poems to most of India's leading newspapers and periodicals. Later he gave up professional writing to concentrate on his sadhana. His poems have been featured in recent years in religious/philosophical journals in India, UK and the US. He also reviews books for the Mountain Path, the international periodical of the Ramana Maharshi ashrama. A devotee of Ramana Maharshi for over four decades, he is also devoted to Mata Amritanandamayi. Entry: Mystique of Grace.

Sri Bharat Thakkarhas lived in the United States since 1964, but has continued to write and publish in India. In 1968, he received the gold medal from the Gujarati Literary Conference and an award from the State Government of Gujarat. He is

currently an adjunct associate professor for the Illinois Institute of Technology's Mechanical Engineering Department, and works for AT&T-Bell Laboratories. His poetry is "the outcome of a constant search in the inner being of my existence as I tend to visualize and feel the love in every atom of this planet." Entry: Powerful Being.

Master Nomeis a Self-Realized disciple of the great sage of Arunachala, South India, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharishi. A temple and ashram, known as the Society of Abidance in Truth, has grown up around him at 1834 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, California 95060, USA. SAT is the prime distributor of books by and about Sri Maharishi in the US and also publishes scriptures pertaining to Vedanta and worship of Siva. Master Nome and SAT are closely affiliated with Sri Ramanasramam, and he was the first "western sage" ever to address the National Seminar and Cultural Festival in Bangalore. Entry: Ananda Natesa.

Sri Eknath Easwaran:Schooled in both Eastern and Western traditions, Eknath Easwaran took to the spiritual life amidst a successful career in India as a professor of English literature, writer and lecturer. He came to the University of California, Berkeley, in 1960 on the Fulbright exchange program and established the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in Northern California in 1961. His 1968 UC Berkeley class is believed to be the first accredited course in meditation at any Western university. His deep personal experience and his love for his students have made the ancient art of meditation accessible to those who hold jobs and live active lives among friends and family.

Srimata Swami Atmanandaspent nearly twelve years of her life with her beloved gurudev Parmahansa Swami Muktananda at his monastery at Ganeshpuri, India, which, she says, "still was and still is a tapasya dham, a place of very intense discipline." She is now active in spreading Sanatana Dharma in the Hindu communities of Trinidad and Tobago. Entries: The Dance of Sivaand The Inner Self of All is One.

Smt. Meenakshi Devi Bhavananiis an American-born citizen of India who has lived in Pondicherry for over 20 years. She is an accomplished bharatanatyam dancer and a prolific author. Her husband, the late Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri was the popular and respected spiritual head of Ananda Ashram. He is succeeded by their son, Ananda Balayogi Giri, who is completing his medical education. Smt. Meenakshi Devi carries on the ashram work. Entry: Remembering Our Purpose.

Princess Aswathi Thirunal Gouri Lakshmi Bayiis the daughter of Maharani Karthika Thirunal Lakshmi Bayi and Col. GV Raja of Poonjar Palace, and the younger niece of Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Rama Varma and Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma. She lives with her husband and two sons at the Kaudiar Palace in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. She holds a great many positions in business, civic and charitable organizations and is a well established writer of poetry and prose, both in English and Malayalam. Among her many published works are several volumes of poetry and numerous articles in international publications. Her current upcoming publications are: Temples of Travancore, Hinduism through the Eyes of a Child and a book on Sree Chithira Thirunal, Maharaja of Travancore. Entry: Sree Saraswathy Amman Temple.

Professor Huston Smithis the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Syracuse University in New York. He is currently Visiting Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. World renowned writer, scholar and teacher, he is perhaps best known as the author of The World's Religions, which for thirty years has been the most widely used textbook on comparative religion. Entry: A Tear Met the Dust.

Jyothi Palaniis a devotee of Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. His biographical statement: "Born in America. Raised in America. I live in Hinduism. It is my life. Inspired daily by my Gurudeva's guidance, and his divine knowledge. I plow my way through life in America with Saivite Hinduism as the vehicle. Faced with American challenges every day, I attend public high school as a junior. Again I plow through this, with Gurudeva's teachings and Hinduism's rich culture. I constantly have to fight my way out of the huge storm as a 16-year-old white Hindu." Entry: Maelstrom.

Sajila Deviis a devotee of the Murugan Temple in Fiji. Entry: A Beautiful Poem.

Dr. Anu Mitra, born and raised in Calcutta, has been steeped in the languages and literature of India and Europe since early childhood. After acquiring her BA degree in English literature, she worked for several years with women victims of domestic violence in India. She continued her commitment to social change in the Puerto-Rican section of inner-city New Haven, USA, with adult literacy programs, and currently at the Hospice of Cincinnati. She is the Director of University Communications

at the Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, and editor of The Network, the Union Institute's journal on children's issues. Entry: Gratitude.

Mrs. Gayatri Rajanlives with her husband and two children in Canyon, California. They are devotees of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. Gayatri has just published her first book, The Story of Santoshi Devi which she also wrote and illustrated herself [see this month's book review page]. Entry: Another Metamorphosis.

Miss Meenakshi Devi Palani, who lives with her brother Jyothi in Concord, California, is also a devotee of Satguru Sivayasubramuniyaswami. She stated, "I have written much about Hindu culture and the experiences I have had throughout my life. My mother has home schooled me since first grade. I am now entering High School, looking forward to taking classes at the Junior College. My mother has taught me to be a good student and a strong Hindu. I am thankful to have a loving family. My dream for the future is to study Ayurveda and Acupuncture, and to continue with my study of bharatanatyam dance. Jai Ganesha!" Entry: My Pilgrimage.

--The folk-art pieces on each page were adapted from Madhubani by K. Prakash, which beautifully features the artistic legacy of the men and women from Madhubans and Jitwanpur. The book is published by The Design Point, Bombay. K. Prakash is an author and a well-known textile designer with a studio in his home, Bombay.